Dr. ANNIE BESANT - HER WORK

FOR

INDIA'S SWARAJ

by

A. RANGASWAMI AIYAR

Sometime Vice-President, National Home Rule League

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।

लोकसंग्रहमेवापि संपश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥

Bhagavad-gita, III-20

HALL OF THEOSOPHY,

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ANNIE BESANT, P. T. S.

PREFATORY NOTE

In the following pages is given a brief history of the movement for the attainment of India's freedom chiefly relating to the active part taken by Dr. Annie Besant in conducting the campaign in a vigorous manner. The part she took was remarkable in many ways. She came to this country in her 47th year and adopted it as her 'Motherland of ages' after she had already won public recognition as a great leader in several Reform movements in the West and other parts of the world by her outstanding oratorical gifts, her numerous writings on religious, social, philosophical and political subjects, and her strenuous, active, and tireless work, in several fields of beneficent activities for the public. She warmly appreciated the genius of our people and their ancient culture and civilization, as manifested through their agelong history. She had a constructive plan for the work she undertook for the raising of India in the scale of Nations. She first took up the religious, philosophical and intellectual side of that work and built the Central Hindu College, Banaras, as an inspiring centre of Hindu culture, which subsequently served as the

basis for the Banaras Hindu University. She next helped in imparting a spiritual basis for reforms in Hindu social customs and habits which in the course of the passage of centuries or millennia could not but present some features or accretions unsuitable for our present age, which may even become impediments for further progress unless suitably modified or altered in accord with the genius of our national culture. She laid due stress on the part Indian Womanhood should play in the New India which was rising into view, and the general equipment ranging from the spiritual to the material with which it should be endowed to play its rightful part in national life. In the material and economic spheres she recognized the importance of encouraging Swadeshi enterprises in our industries and manufactures. She worked for the amelioration of all people including depressed classes irrespective of caste, creed, or community, for the building of a united Nation. She was the first to organize and develop the Scout Movement amongst Indians. Briefly told, she worked for the building of a New India of the future, more glorious as she said than at any period in her ancient past. She believed that unless India attained political freedom she

could not speak with a voice and an authority which would be listened to by the outer world and that the resuscitation of India on her ancient lines combined with modern scientific knowledge was necessary not only for our people but also for the whole world. So she incessantly worked for achieving that result dedicating all her great qualities of head and heart for the realisation of her plans

India has won her political freedom and, abolishing feudal states under many princes, has begun to grow as a Welfare State with due regard for the personal liberty of the individual along with respect for law and order. All the great religions of the world uniquely gathered in her broad bosom are striving to work in harmony and brotherhood. She is being recognized as a friend of all nations in the world with hostility or illwill towards none and is a worker for world peace. Internally, communities which formerly manifested conflicting diversities are being welded into a single nation. A single National Language is adopted without sacrificing the advantages of several ancient classical and regional languages with their distinctive literatures coming from long past. She is planning to build big national industries with due recognition of the importance

of small and cottage industries to develop the economic condition of her people. She is engaged in carrying out great river valley schemes and irrigation projects for promoting the prosperity of her people and is paying due attention to all aspects of national progress ranging from the spiritual to the material. It is natural that in the mighty process of Nation-building some mistakes may be committed here and there to be rectified in the light of further experience. In building this New India Dr. Annie Besant has taken a leading and abiding part. Therefore, her work in India during the past four decades is an inspiration for all of us to work for its development in the future with unabated vigour. She serves as an inspiring example for showing how effective strenuous political work can be successfully organized and accomplished by a person dedicated to high spiritual and moral ideals without prejudice to them for the integral development of our people in all aspects of national life in spite of tendencies working towards disruption or disunion which have not yet been fully eradicated.

"VASANTASHRAMA"
MATHURAI (S. India)
20—12—1955.

A. RANGASWAMI AIYAR.

Dr. ANNIE BESANT-HER WORK FOR INDIA'S SWARAJ

"I hope that within a period of months rather than years, there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of our Nations, a Dominion of another race, a Dominion that will find self-respect as an equal within this Commonwealth. I refer to India." —*Ramsay Macdonald,*
July 2, 1928.

The story of How India won Her Freedom is a unique and thrilling one in many ways extending to about three quarters of a century. The founding of the Indian National Congress is an important milestone in the passage towards that freedom. Before the Congress was founded there were several movements appearing in different parts of the country betokening the stirring of a new life surging the country, energising the people in the different provinces, to come together and unite for the building of a new nation. But they worked independently of each other, and lacked the cohesive strength which the united voice of a Nation can impart, sustain and develop.

In Bengal, the new life was manifested in the labours of the preachers of the Brahmo Samaj and the British Indian Association. 'Indian Mirror' was voicing India's aspirations under the editorship of Babu Narendranath Sen. In the Punjab Swami Dayanand Saraswati was giving a new life through the founding of the Arya Samaj and its several activities, religious, social and educational. In Bombay State 'Indu Prakash' was upholding India's interests and aspirations. Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Dinshaw Edulji Wacha, and other leaders were sources of inspiration, along with the activities of the Bombay Presidency Association. In Poona the Sarva Janik Sabha, and the founders of Fergusson College were sources of inspiration for working for the uplift of the people. In Madras the Mahajana Sabha and the 'Hindu' under the editorship of G. Subramania Ayyar were doing similar work. The Theosophical Society after shifting its Headquarters in 1879 to India was bringing some of the enlightened leaders in different parts of the country in its annual conventions, who naturally did not confine themselves to the task of working for the direct objects of the Society alone, but informally went beyond to consider the political aims of the country from a national point of view.

A. O. Hume, who had retired from his official position as a Secretary of the Government of India, was once a member of the Society but latterly determined to devote his great talents and ability to the service of the Indian people.

In England Henry Fawcett, John Bright, Charles Bradlaugh and others were raising their voice in the British Parliament upholding the cause of India. Dr. Besant in her "On the Watch Tower Notes" in her magazine "Theosophist" for January 1929 pp 340, 341 stated that her Guru who is a Hindu Rishi working in the field of Nations ruling and guiding as far as possible the progress of nations, amongst which the political progress of India was concerned, tried to begin such a movement through the members of the Society by urging the starting of a paper in Bengal called 'The Phoenix' in 1885 under the editorship of A. P. Sinnett, when he withdrew from the editorship of 'the Pioneer'. This attempt though supported by Narendranath Sen of Calcutta failed as sufficient funds could not be raised.

In late December 1884, 17 leaders who met in Madras in Diwan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao's house, nearly all of whom had been delegates to the just ended Theosophical Convention at Adyar,

conceived the idea of a political National Movement to serve the Motherland. Their names were given by Narendranath Sen of Calcutta in his paper 'Indian Mirror'.

It was decided in March 1885 to hold a meeting of representatives from all parts of India in December 1885 in Poona. The first session of The Indian National Congress was held in Poona with Mr. W. C. Bonnergea as President. It demanded amongst other reforms the expansion of Legislative Councils with elected members. Its popularity and influence increased as the Indian National Congress met in important cities of the country in successive years.

A. O. Hume by his pamphlets 'Old Man's Hope' and 'Star in the East' stirred the people's enthusiasm. Deputation of leading Indian politicians went to England on behalf of the Congress and appealed to British Democracy to support the demands of the Congress. Indian National Congress appointed a Committee in England to carry on its objects, whose moving spirits in 1892-95 were A.O.Hume, Sir William Wedderburn and Sir Henry Cotton. And a newspaper called 'India' was started in England to support the Congress, originally under the editorship of Mr. Gordon Hewart

(subsequently Lord Chief Justice of England). In the British House of Commons now also some members like W. S. Caine, Samuel Smith, Charles Bradlaugh, Herbert Roberts (now Lord Clwyd)and others spoke on behalf of India.

The Congress of 1889 held in Bombay welcomed the presence of Charles Bradlaugh to whom an address was read by Sir William Wedderburn, a retired civilian of Bombay, who supported the Congress cause, on behalf of the Congress. Charles Bradlaugh agreed to plead the cause of India in the House of Commons and said "I am here because I believe you wish, as we in England have done, to win within the limits of the constitution the most perfect equality and right for all. In a great Empire like ours, all we have the right to equality before the law for all, equality of opportunity for all, equality of expression for all, penalty on none, favouritism to none...... In this movement, no force save the force of brain, no secret union, all open, frank before the law, so far as one man may, and so far as one man's speech can do, English liberty shall put itself on the side of yours". But to India's loss his powerful advocacy was lost as he died soon after.

In the ranks of the Congress itself, ardent spirits appeared who were not satisfied with the slow response which the British Government made to Congress demands and so the difference between them and the Congress became more and more pronounced, and their relations became more and more estranged. The Government became alarmed and took severe steps to stem down the opposition and encourage the more moderate. Some of the Congress leaders now and then got high preferments like High Court judgeships and Council memberships and the like, and some of the leaders of the Congress whom the Government wanted to put down were prosecuted for sedition or externed without trial under the old Regulation III of 1816. In the Calcutta Congress of 1906 presided over by Dadhabhai Naoroji which followed the partition of Bengal in 1906 during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty, and the widespread popular agitation which condemned it, the President of the Congress declared Swaraj as the goal aimed by the Congress and the Congress adopted the fourfold programme of Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education. Swadeshi movement and Boycott of British goods were organised in Bengal to oppose its partition. The terrorist movement followed which Dr. Besant

opposed strongly though giving credit to its sincerity and misplaced enthusiasm. The Congress of 1907 held in Surat and presided over by Rash Behari Ghose was memorable as it was interrupted in its commencement by a disturbance amongst the delegates themselves of which one section constituted the left wing of the Congress led by B. G. Tilak and in which Babu Arabinda Ghose (later Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry) and others took prominent part, and the Congress was suspended.

A constitution was drawn up by a National Convention at Allahabad in April 1908 which excluded the Extremists.

In 1910 the British Government introduced what were called Minto-Morley Reforms with separate representation for Muslims, giving a fresh impetus to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The rift between the right and left wings of the Congress developed into Moderates and Extremists. The Moderates held separate annual Conferences under the designation of Liberals, and the Congress came under the control of Extremists. Until we came to the year 1913 the political situation continued to be in a disturbed condition. An attempt was made to assassinate

the Viceroy Lord Hardinge. There was prosecution of those concerned in Ghadra conspiracy to win independence by force Bhai Paramanand was convicted and sentenced to transportation for life and Arabinda Ghose who was under prosecution for sedition escaped to Pondicherry in 1910 to avoid arrest.

The grant of separate representation to the Muslims in the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1908 strengthened the communal bitterness, and weakened the struggle for the attainment of India's freedom. Until 1914 the Congress did not adequately outline the work to be done during each coming year after the Congress Session was over and the political work for the whole country lacked point and vigour and had been spasmodic and sporadic and largely ineffective.

Annie Besant who joined the Theosophical Society in 1888, visited India for the first time in 1893 after fulfilling her obligations, public and personal, in England, to give the Theosophical Society's Convention Lectures, dedicating her life to the service of India which she regarded as her Motherland of ages. Her services for India had already begun in 1878 when she published a little

book on England, India and Afghanistan, condemning the invasion of the last named country. From that time until 1913 she was labouring in the fields of Religion, Philosophy, Education and Social Reform. To impart education to India's future citizens on National lines, and to inspire in their minds patriotism and devotion to Motherland, she founded the Central Hindu College in Banaras City. Under its auspices she helped in the compiling and publication of text books on Hinduism called Sanatana Dharma Series for the correct understanding of the tenets and principles of Hinduism by modern minds, which until then had not been coherently and rationally enunciated in a manner which would embrace all the teachings of Hinduism spread over a large, extensive literature having their origin in immemorial times and constituting the beliefs of diverse sects and communities amongst Hindus often opposing each other. In the field of social reform, she spoke against the evils of early marriage amongst boys and girls and called upon students to take 'Stalwart' pledges abstaining from such early marriage, condemning enforced virgin widowhood, and prohibiting the ban on foreign voyages and the like. To set an example she dressed herself in Indian style and adopted other

simple and noble habits of social intercourse. Wherever practicable, she preferred the use of Swadeshi articles over those of foreign manufacture. In September 1913 she organized a band of public workers called 'The Brothers of Service' for the uplift of India who pledged themselves along with other objects to promote union amongst workers in the fields of spiritual, educational, social and political progress under the headship and direction of the Indian National Congress.

After doing the above preliminary work she entered into the field of Indian Politics. In October and November 1913 she gave a series of public lectures in Madras 'to mark' as she said 'the beginning of an earnest and concerted movement for the uplifting of India'. The subjects of her lectures were comprehensive and embraced diverse fields and included amongst others 'Social Reforms including Foreign Travel, Child Marriage and its effects, Duty to depressed classes, Indian Industries as related to Self-Government, Mass Education, Education of Indian Girls, The Colour Bar in England, the Colonies and India, and the Passing away of the Caste System'. These lectures were brought out in a book with a title "Wake up India". In the preface to that book she has

said "May the Guardian of India bless the effort inspired by Him".

In this connection it may be considered relevant if a statement in a brief compass is made about the cardinal articles of faith and belief which actuated her life and action and especially her work for India and Indians done in an intense and sustained manner uninterruptedly with utmost faith and strength of conviction for about four decades. She was more than forty when she took up this work and as a noted English public worker is said to have remarked that if she had chosen to remain in England and continued her work there in different spheres of public activities, no position in the public life of her own native country would be deemed too high for her to reach with her outstanding abilities and talents and wonderful gifts of eloquence and enthusiastic zeal and noble self-sacrifice in the cause of the poor and downtrodden and for the public weal. For the earnest student of political history in these times when India was passing through a highly creative period in her long history, some light would be thrown on the enigma of her appearance and work at this time.

The following few lines introduced in the course of a brief narrative of the course of affairs

in India's Freedom History are not for the delectation of the sceptic or the superficial student of world's affairs and they may pass over them as evoking no great interest. She believed in an Inner Spiritual Government of our worlds at the head of which is the Great Ruler of our Solar System called Ishwara or God by the votaries of different faiths assisted by great Hierarchies of divine powers For our earth His Represeetative is Bhagavan(Lord)Sanat Kumara with his Disciples* residing in Their *Aprakrita*(subtle)bodies of virgin youth created by Their yogic power (Kriya Shakthi) in Shamballa in Gobi desert, inaccessible to ordinary humanity. His ministers are Bhagavan Vaivaswata Manu guiding the Government of our World with its different races,and Bhagavan Vyasa or Jagat Guru (World teacher) guiding the spiritual progress of the world and the founding of different religions for the guidance of different races in their spiritual evolution. Each Nation has a great Rishi(sage)guiding its affairs and India is under the guidance of Rishi Agastya, and 2 Disciples of Bhagavan Vaivasvata Manu and Bhagavan Vyasa are the 2Hindu Rishis, Rishi Morya and Rishi Koot Hoomi, who in Their Hindu bodies are

* 'Ancient Four' in Bhagavad Gita Ch. X Shl. 6.

residing in an inaccessible place in the Himalayas, under whose inspiration the Theosophical Society was founded. Human evolution is guided by Them, though unseen. Their guidance is generally unknown and unrecognized though it is given without any impairment of the freedom of will and unfettered discretion of general mass of Humanity and its leaders in the outer world, though major blunders of mankind are guarded against or prevented or neutralized or remedied in Their mighty wisdom. Annie Besant recognized Their guidance and was guided in all her actions by Their general plan. Thus so far as the inner springs of the motives underlying her actions in the political field, a brief account has been given.

In October 1913 a great public meeting was called by the Madras Congress Committee at which Dr. Besant demanded a standing Committee of the British House of Commons for consideration of Indian Affairs. Holding the view that India should occupy an equal place along with other free dominions in the British Commonwealth of Nations without which India as a subject Nation or dependency could not contribute her rich gifts for the benefit of humanity as a whole, she desired that India shousd attain Swaraj or self-rule for which an organized agitation in the country

throughout the year and not merely during the few days in which the annual Conference or Congress held its annual sessions was necessary. In January 1914 she opened her political campaign by giving a political lecture in Madurai presided over by its Municipal Chairman, and a public address was given to her. She founded the Weekly 'The Commonweal' in January 1914 to aid her in her political work and agitation for Swaraj. In June 1914 she purchased a languishing Madras Daily Newspaper called 'Madras Standard' and christened it aptly as 'New India' and in its pages began an intensive campaign claiming 'Home Rule for India' which appeared as a constant refrain in its pages.

The First World War was declared in August 1914. She became a delegate to the Indian National Congress in December 1914, and gave a public reception to Babu Bhupendra Nath Basu, the president of that year Congress Session, and the leading delegates. In the midst of the World War when it was seemingly going against the allies she was summoned to Shamballa in the Gobi Desert by Bhagavan Sanat Kumara. She went in her subtle body in August 1915. There she was given what she always called her

'Marching Orders". "You will have your time of trouble and danger, I need not say, have no fear; but have no anxiety; Do not let opposition become angry. Be firm but not provocative. Press steadily the preparation for the coming changes, and claim India's place in the Empire. Do not let it be stained by excess. Remember that you represent in the Outer World the Regent who is my Agent. My hand will be over you and my Peace with you". (Theosophist, November 1929 Vol. I. P. 151.) She knew that the Allies would ultimately be victorious.

The above words necessarily marked out the policy to be followed by her. India should be within the Empire or Commonwealth but free and equal with the other Dominions. Freedom should be by peaceful methods eschewing violence which would bring great suffering to unarmed Indian people, although Arabinda Ghose and other Extremists led by him were not opposed to using force for winning freedom for India. At the same time she strongly condemned German aggression which led to the First Great World War and was sure that the Allies would succeed. She attended the Congress Session in Bombay in December 1915 under the presidency of Satyendra Prasanna Sinha

(who became subsequently Lord Sinha) who as a Moderate characterised in his presidential address those who claimed full freedom for India as 'impatient idealists'. Dr. Besant while the Congress was holding its Session in 1915 called for a private meeting of the prominent leaders of the Congress in China Baug in Girgaum Back Road, Bombay, with Surendranath Bannerjee, reckoned as one of the boldest amongst the Congress leaders, as their Chairman. She placed her plan for the starting of the Home Rule League for India with the object of carrying on an intense propaganda and agitation for the attainment of Swaraj or Home Rule. The persons who attended the meeting were startled at hearing the words 'Home Rule' as the object of her political work and agitation, and recalled to their memories the nature of Parnell's Home Rule movement in Ireland with all the violent agitation carried on under that name by Parnell and his fellow agitators, and apprehended that Dr. Besant would turn out to be a stormy petrel in the smooth sea of Indian politics. The leaders who assembled at that meeting desired to avoid the starting of a new organization under her leadership in competition with the Indian National Congress as it with its gentler method of merely

passing annual resolutions would lose its importance. They represented to Dr. Besant that Congress would take up the work which she had in view. She agreed to wait till 1st September 1916 to give that privilege to Congress for starting the work. 1st of September 1916 came with no work done by the Congress in that direction.

Long before this a spacious building had been built in Madras by her and called 'Gokhale Hall, in memory of Gopala Krishna Gokhale for his self sacrificing labours for his nation, for holding public meetings, and for carrying on political, social, welfare, educational and cultural functions.

In this context, it would be useful if a short account is given of the different forces working then in Indian Political field. On constitutional lines Mahadev Govind Ranade though engaged as a judicial officer was inspiring with his high ideals the promotion of political, social, religious, and economic reforms amongst the younger generation who gathered round him in Western India, and stimulating by his vigorous and active energy several activities in those fields. Gopala Krishna Gokhale had founded the 'Servants of India Society' in Poona

in which promising young men were trained to lead self-sacrificing lives of active work for the promotion of public good in different directions. Under his leadership, a group of self-sacrificing public workers had arisen in Poona. Similar public workers were labouring for the uplift of India on peaceful and constitutional lines in Bengal and Madras.

At the same time there were young spirits earnest, self-sacrificing and public-spirited, not disdaining the use of force in the attainment of national aims and objects. In Bengal there was a terrorist movement in which young men joined, some of whom were prosecuted and sentenced to death. In the Punjab, there were Sikh settlers who went to Canada and United States and returned. They brought with them ideas of winning political freedom through force. There was a case called Ghadra Conspiracy Case in which some were implicated and sentenced. Bhai Paramanand, a prominent member of the Arya Samaj already referred to was prosecuted and sentenced to death which sentence was subsequently commuted to transportation for life in the Andamans.

Dr. Besant had founded the Central Hindu College in Banaras in order to create a generation

of young men and women who would develop into future citizens of India inspired by noble spiritual ideals native to the soil but adapted to modern conditions. She planned at first to found a great National University aimed at promoting Indian Nationalism to which both Hindus and Muslims could make equal contribution through their respective denominational Colleges, the Anglo - Oriental College at Alighar representing the Muslim cultural ideals, and the Central Hindu College at Banaras representing those of the Hindu, to build an Indian Nation from their harmonious co-operation. In this she could not succeed, as the authorities of the Muslim Alighar College wanted a Muslim University, and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, though not in control of any College, was equally insisting on the founding of a Hindu University. Dr. Besant despairing about the fulfilment of her object of obtaining a charter for her Indian National University for both religious and secular ideals which would help to create patriotic citizens of noble character, agreed to give her Central Hindu College, to serve as a nucleus for the Hindu University aimed at by Pandit M. M. Malaviya.

In the Central Hindu College she had placed restrictions on the admission of married students

and those who were inclined to use of force in the promotion of political objects. In Madras the Young Men's Indian Association had been founded by her and had its Headquarters in Gokhale Hall with branches in the mofussil. The terrorist movement had its adherents. They had supporters in Maharashtra. Thereafter that movement spread to Bengal. In Poona 2 British Military officers were assassinated owing to the severity of measures taken to control the plague. G. K. Gokhale who was in England wrote to the Press about the severity of the measures taken by Government in enforcing plague regulations and made certain allegations against the Government. While he was returning from England and was on the eve of reaching the country he was compelled by Bombay Government, while on steamer before landing, to communicate to the press in England withdrawing his allegations against the authorities working the Plague Regulations.

In Bengal some ardent youths were found involved in Terrorist activities committing assassinations of British Officers. Khudiram Bose who was one of them was prosecuted and sentenced to death and executed. Dr. Besant who was the Founder of the Central Hindu College set her face

strongly against youths being concerned in political crimes although inspired by ardent patriotism. When the Prince of Wales (who later became George V) visited India, she invited him to visit the Central Hindu College. But the Government did not look with favour upon Dr. Besant's invitation of the Prince to visit the College. But she however succeeded in arranging his visit. Sir Curzon Wylie was assassinated in England and Savarkar for his cry of approbation of the act was arrested in England and brought to India for trial after some dispute with the French Government in whose boundaries he escaped during the voyage and was seized. He was tried and sentenced to imprisonment for life. After his release he became the President of Hindu Mahasabha. Arabinda Ghose took part in leading the revolutionary movement in Bengal and founded or supported revolutionary papers in English and Bengali called 'Bande Mataram', 'Navashakti', 'Karmayogin' and 'Dharma'. Bipin Chandra Pal was a co-worker in some of his attempts before Arabinda Ghose escaped to Pondicherry where he founded a spiritual school called "Aurobindo Ashram" and withdrew from Indian Politics but without losing interest in it.

But the demarcation between constitutional and unconstitutional lines was thin and bare. Some people were not strictly confined to one side or the other. But in the main the political agitation was on constitutional lines. There were some political deputations which were sent to England to plead the cause of India before the British Public. In 1885 a deputation consisting of Surendranath Bannerjee of Bengal, Chandavarkar of Bombay, and Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar of Madras went to England to plead the cause of India before the British Public. Occasional deputations consisting of G. Subramania Ayyar of Madras, Mudholkar of Berars, Lalmohan Ghose of Bengal and Gopala Krishna Gokhale of Poona, went. After the Indian National Congress met in Karachi in December 1913 a deputation consisting of Bhupendranath Basu from Bengal, M. A. Jinnah and Samarth from Bombay, Krishna Sahay from Bihar, who were joined later by Lala Lajput Rai from Lahore, went to England in accordance with the resolution of the Karachi Congress passed in December 1913.

She had also started Young Men's Indian Association with branches in different places for inspiring young Indians, and training them to

fulfill their role as free citizens in a future Free India with high ideals of service to the Motherland and for their healthy boarding and accommodation. For similar work she had organized 'The Orders of the Sons and Daughters of India'.

In Gokhale Hall, Madras, on 1st September 1916, Dr. Besant inaugurated Home Rule League amidst great enthusiasm. She attended and presided over political conferences and gave political lectures in different parts of the country advocating Home Rule for India. She was strongly of the view that unless there was the union of the Moderates and Extremists in the political ranks and Hindu-Muslim unity became an established fact and a United National Demand was made to Britain claiming Swaraj, there would be no chance of freedom for India being obtained and the Bill for such freedom being passed through the British Parliament and placed on the statute book. She had to make frequent visits to Poona to bring Gokhale and Tilak together to present a united front. As Pheroze Shah Mehta was ill, she could not meet him. As Muslims and Hindus should be brought together, she prevailed upon Mahomad Ali Jinnah to become one of the Secretaries of the Home Rule League.

Vigorous activities were appearing from day to day; sometimes signed leading articles from the pen of Dr. Besant were appearing in the columns of her daily "New India" upholding the claims of India to Swaraj. The Government were alarmed at the new persistent method of agitation adopted by Dr. Besant and wanted to repress the upwelling tide of popular excitement. Her press publishing 'New India' was repeatedly called upon to furnish higher and higher securities under the Press Act and she contested in the Madras High Court the validity of such orders and the forfeiture of the securities she furnished. The publicity of the proceedings which she conducted in person in the High Court simply intensified the agitation for Home Rule. Various branches of the Home Rule League were formed in the different parts of the country.

To bring about the rapprochement of the Congress and the Muslim League closer together, both held their annual Sessions in Lucknow in December 1916 and the Congress-League Reforms were formulated to which both moderate and extremist wings of the Congress were parties as well as Muslim League. In Easter 1916, South Indian Political Conference was held at Cuddalore in which Dr. Besant took a prominent part. Madras

Government with Lord Pentland at their head were panic-stricken and it was reported she was asked to leave the shores of India. She is said to have refused, declaring that her stay in India was essential for her work.

On 16th June 1917 she and her political co-workers G. S. Arundale and B. P. Wadia were under orders of Madras Government interned in Ootacamund and prevented from indulging in political propaganda and writing to their paper 'New India'. In her parting letter to Indian people prior to going into Internment she hoped to see India win Home Rule before she passed away. A huge protest meeting was held in Gokhale Hall Madras, to which representatives from the Districts came, with similar protest meetings and processions in different places in the Province. On 16th of every succeeding month large processions and protest meetings were organized in important towns in the Province. Dr. Besant's internment operated as a powerful factor in increasing the strength of the movement for Home Rule not only in India but also in United States and in the Dominions of the Commonwealth, as Dr. Besant wielded considerable influence as a world figure. Thus was found by Government that Mrs. Besant under internment

was not less powerful as an agitator for Home Rule for India than when she was free. President Wilson of America made diplomatic represantations to British Government against her internment owing to the pressure of public opinion in United States.

Then came the proclamation of British Government through the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford,dated 20th August 1917, that self-government with which Government of India was in complete accord was the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of Responsible Government in India, as an integral part of British Empire, and that the stages of which would be determind by Britain, and that substantial steps in that direction would be taken as soon as possible. The Secretary of State Mr. Montagu and the Viceroy toured the country and made their report containing their proposals of reforms. The public opinion in India considered the announcement of 20th August 1917 as disappointing and unsatisfactory. Dr. Besant had co-workers in England like Major Graham Pole and others and many sympathisers in America and other parts of the world. She and her colleagues were released from internment in

August 1917 and her work in hastening the reforms was recognized by the public and she was elected President of next succeeding Congress amidst great enthusiasm which held its sessions in Calcutta in December 1917. As President of the Congress she considered that her work did not end with her presiding over the Congress Sessions but that she should carry on her duties in that capacity during the whole year of 1918 until the next Congress was held in Delhi in December 1918.

She worked incessantly going round the country rousing the enthusiasm of the people in support of Home Rule. Montagu-Chelmsford proposals were for Dyarchy in the Provinces leaving the Central Government untouched. There was a section amongst the Moderates who welcomed the Reforms proposed in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. A special Congress was held in August 1918 in Bombay in which the Moderates and the Extremists came to a compromise which modified the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals by resolving that full Responsible Government should be introduced in the Provinces and that for a period of 6 years the Department of Law, Justice and Police, Prisons excepted, might be reserved subjects and the rest should be administered by popular

ministers in the centre. In the Congress of 1918 in Delhi, Dr. Besant proposed Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya as President. She pleaded for unity amongst our people, against which she said that all the reactionary forces in England and India would be powerless. In that Congress in Delhi full Responsible Government was demanded for the Provinces and it was resolved that a statute should be passed immediately for the establishment of full Responsible Government in India, the full measure of which should be attained within a time to be fixed in the statute itself, at an early date, and that the Congress-League Scheme should be immediately introduced by statute as a first step in the process of introducing Responsible Government in the Centre. In the Congress Session of 1918 Dr. Besant though agreeing that the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were disappointing and unsatisfactory, yet proposed that they should be worked for what they were worth, and with their aid further reforms should be striven for and obtained.

Gandhiji came to India from South Africa with a distinction of organizing passive resistance movement for redressing the grievances of British Indians in that country against the oppressive treatment by the White Government. He had

previously appeared in the 17th Session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1901 as a Petitioner on behalf of hundred thousand Indians in South Africa and moved a resolution relating to their grievances in the Congress Session in Lahore in 1909 and Gopala Krishna Gokhale moved the resolutions for rendering help to Indians in that country in their long and patient struggle led by Gandhiji. After his arrival in India he gained great popularity by his self-sacrificing labour on behalf of the labourers in Indigo Estates in Bihar and in dedicating his life for the masses. He applied the principle of absolute Ahimsa or non-violence for the attainment of political objects, that principle which is enshrined in Hinduism from time immemorial as well as in Jainism and Buddhism though not yet applied for attainment of political objects. Gandhiji paid also due regard to the principle of non-violence enunciated in the 'Sermon on the Mount.' He now said that by adoption of his passive resistance method which later came to be known as Satyagraha, as Gandhiji insisted that Truth and Non-violence should both be practised by those joining the movement, India could obtain full Responsible Government by peaceful means. This movement aimed at paralysing Government by non-co-operating with it in all its functions, by

boycotting Legislative Councils, Local Boards and Municipal Councils, by calling upon public servants to abstain from performance of their public duties, by calling upon lawyers to cease from practising in courts, calling upon people to disobey laws and court prosecutions and suffer imprisonment and sale of their properties, in consequence of nonpayment of taxes, and similar methods, thereby compelling the Government to agree to the demand for Swaraj. After the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms were placed on the statute book, the elected members of the Legislature who joined the movement abstained from taking part in their legislative functions. The movement spread in consequence of repeated prosecutions of the offenders by Government. Government passed repressive laws. But after Gandhiji started his Civil Disobedience Movement and proclaimed Ahimsa and Truth as his weapons, the terrorist movement languished and gradually lost its strength. Dr. Besant set herself strongly against Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement later called Satyagraha, while at the same time she was carrying on an intensive agitation for Home Rule as she was firmly of the view that regard for law and order would be weakened if laws were generally disobeyed apart from particular laws being chosen for disobedience

by general consent on account of their oppressive character, as chaos and anarchy would be the result whatever be the Reforms the Government introduced. She was of the view that even though unsatisfactory and disappointing, they should be utilized for obtaining full Swaraj.

Although theoretically Dr. Besant like Arabinda Ghose was not opposed to the view that a subject nation would be justified in using force for attaining independence, she thought that in India it would be folly for the people who were unarmed and disorganized and divided into opposite camps like Hindus and Muslims, to try to secure independence by rising in rebellion, as the British would certainly quell it by force, and untold suffering would be inflicted on the people as it happened after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

Charles Bradlaugh under whom Dr. Besant had her political experience was an upholder of attaining political liberty by constitutional means i.e., by actions within the law. On 3rd August 1881 Charles Bradlaugh who was elected member of Parliament by the constituency of Northampton wanted to enter the House in spite of the vast police precautions to prevent him from entering and taking his seat. Hundreds of petitioners went with their petitons in support of Bradlaugh and

reached Westminister Hall where they waited on the steps leading to the passage to the lobby. Before Bradlaugh went into the House, he told Mrs. Besant that "people know you better than they know any one save myself; whatever happens, let them do no violence; I trust you to keep them quiet". Gradually the crowd of petitioners grew and grew. The numerous crowd crying 'Petition, Petition, Justice, Justice', surged up the steps charging the Policemen who held the door. As the Police sprang forward to meet the crowd, Mrs. Besant threw herself against them, and with all the advantage of the position at the top of the steps which she had chosen so that everyone in the charging crowd saw her, she bade them to stop for his sake, and keep for him the peace which he had bade her should not be broken. The men drew back sullenly mastering themselves with effort, reining in their wrath still for Bradlaugh's sake. The Police and ushers flung him out. There outside the gate was a vast sea of heads longing to leap to his side. But he asked them to disperse quietly saying "No riots. No disorder".

With that experience she opposed the Civil Disobedience movement. But it spread in India by the repeated prosecutions of the offenders by

Government. The Government passed repressive measures. Mrs. Besant while losing her immense popularity amongst the people by raising her emphatic voice against the Civil Disobedience Movement as it will induce disregard for law and order, was pressing for further reforms till full Swaraj was won. The years between 1920 and 1930 saw the operation of the Civil Disobedience Movement for Swaraj in full force. There were disturbances in the country owing to the spread of the Civil Disobedience or Passive Resistance or Satyagraha movement in which some policemen were thrown into fire at Chauri Chaura which made Gandhiji at times style his action as 'Himalayan blunder'. Mrs. Besant wanted that India should attain Dominion Status by the methods with which British people were familiar and which Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa adopted and attained that status not without struggle, and that India should present a Swaraj scheme not imposed by Britain but framed by India's representatives to the British Parliament which would not dare to refuse. She knew that Britain did not yield readily to the demands of even her own colonists in those countries until she was obliged to recognize the full strength of those movements and came to accept the scheme of full

self-government presented by them. Undeterred by the negative movement of Non-Co-operation, Mrs. Besant carried on the work of agitating for Home Rule even after sharp divisions had occurred between her and leading members of Home Rule League over the resolution passed at the Congress Session in Delhi in 1918. Joint work between them became impossible. The Home Rule League decided for discontinuance of any deputation to England for propaganda on behalf of introducing improvements in the projected Reform Bill based on Montague-Chelmsford proposals for fear of its being considered as a rival to the Congress Deputation.

Then at the request of earnest friends, she founded the National Home Rule League in April 1919 as whose representative, she gave evidence before the Committee of inquiry presided over by Lord Selborne which was constituted by Parliament, and presented before it the aim of National Home Rule League as being ready to work with other bodies with Home Rule as their goal working in all law-abiding ways pressing for all modifications in the bill based on Montague-Chelmsford proposals as resolved both by the Congress and the Moderates Conference held in Bombay in 1918.

In order to accustom our political workers to Parliamentary work and procedure which would be highly useful to them when Swaraj was won, Madras Parliament was founded under her auspices which met periodically in Gokhale Hall, Madras, with leading men acting as Ministers in charge of departments of State, and taking part in debates. Its debates were published as memoranda, one of which was Madras Panchayat Act, being Madras Parliament Transaction No. 3.

After general elections which followed the introduction of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms, the Congress party boycotted the Legislatures. After a time some members of the Congress Party dissatisfied with the negative results flowing from such a policy of abstention separated from the Congress and formed the Swaraj Party under the leadership of Chitta Ranjan Das. The National Home Rule League under the leadership of Dr. Besant though it differed from the policy of the Congress was striving to work in co-operation with it.

A strong Deputation was sent to England on behalf of National Home Rule League consisting of its President, Dr. Besant, B. P. Wadia, P. K. Telang and Jamnadas Dwaraka Das, to educate

public opinion there in favour of Indian Reforms with Home Rule for India as goal, and to enlarge and improve the Government of India Bill. It was open to all who had Home Rule as their goal and stood for the Free Nationhood of India in the British Commonwealth of Nations which Dr. Besant styled as Indo-British Commonwealth.

The active propaganda work of the League consisted in giving lectures in different places, publication of literature, and activities through the Press. A branch of the League called British Auxiliary of Home Rule for India League was started in England with Mr. George Lansbury M.P. as chairman and Mr John Scurr as secretary. Lady Muriel, Countess De la Warr, and Miss Barbara Villiers gave notable help along with Lady Emily Lutyens, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, Mr.&Mrs. Philip Snowden as members of council. An Indian Parliamentary Committee was formed in England with Mrs. Besant as Chairman, Messrs John Scurr and B. P. Wadia as secretaries and a council in which several M. P.'s were council members with corresponding members scattered over the boroughs of England, Scotland and Wales, through whom the League sent out literature and information, who arranged meetings, spread interest about India, and acted as

centres for Indian news, and through whom pamphlets were circulated, which met weekly, consisting of 188 central and corresponding members with nearly 300 Labour Associations and Trade Unions affiliated. She invited Congress and Moderates Deputations to join her in her work in England, and several of the former worked with her though unofficially. She started in England a small private company for the foundation of a weekly newspaper called 'United India'. It was sent to every member of the House of Commons and to a selected list of House of Lords, members and sent also to 20 Indian newspapers every week. A weekly edition of 'New India' was published in India to give more direct Indian news to people in England, America and the Dominions. Mr. Tata and Mrs. Tata were introduced to English audiences as representatives of Indian womanhood to present the case on behalf of Indian women.

A meeting attended by 60 members of Parliament was arranged in a Committee Room of the House of Commons at which addresses were given by Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri of the Liberal Deputation, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar of All India Home Rule League, Mr. M. A.

Jinnah of Muslim League, and Mrs. Besant of National Home Rule League Deputation. National Home Rule Deputation visited several cities and towns in England and Scotland and gave political lectures in support of Indian Reforms. The following places were visited: Various parts of London, Southport, Edinburgh (twice), Glasgow (twice), Bow, Stratford, Croydon, Battersea(thrice), Brighton, Preston, Liverpool, Wellesley, Wigan, Rochdale, Burnby, Bolton, Manchester Free Trade Hall, Oxford, Bradford, Harrogate, York, New-Castle, Stone, Cardiff, Bristol, Bath, Leeds, and Harrow. Articles were written to several London papers, interviews were given to the Press, and generally every opportunity was taken to put India's case before the public. The Deputation was received by Mr. Montague, Secretary of State for India at the India Office and there was a Ladies' Deputation organised by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu which included Mrs Besant. A great meeting was held in Free Trade Hall, Manchester, at which Mrs. Besant spoke, a big meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, and a lecture in the Kingsway Hall, London, under the auspices of the Fabian Society in support of Indian Reforms. Many questions were asked in Parliament by members belonging to the Parliamentary

Committee. Their work was to draw attention of their local M. P's to any approaching Indian matter in the House of Commons and urge their attention to it and their votes on the side of reforms, or where needed, redress of wrong governmental action, to influence residents of locality to write in a similar sense, to circulate information sent to them by the Central Committee, to correct untrue statements about India made in the local Press and write to it in favour of reforms and answering objections, and generally to give help and take any useful action in regard to urging on the British public their duty towards India. About 200 Trade Unions and Labour Organizations were affiliated to the Committee to help in agitation for India's freedom, to put pressure on members of Parliament to vote for India's freedom and Indian interests, and on Parliamentary candidates to promise to support Indian freedom and Indian interests. This was due to the work of Mr. John Scurr. Meetings were organised in England by several women's Societies, 'Britain and India League' and various Labour Organizations. Mrs. Besant addressed the famous Pioneer Club (believed to be the first women's club) and various women's societies, a Labour Conference at Southport and a meeting of Home

Rule for Scotland League. Articles were written in several London papers, interviews were given to the Press and every opportunity was taken to put India's case before the public. Several 'At Homes' were given to the more fashionable section of society.

After the Amritsar Congress of 1919 Mrs. Besant made several tours lecturing on the reforms in different parts of India. Thousands of copies of Sir Sankaran Nair's minute of dissent to Government of India's proposals of Reforms and of the minute of dissent of Prof. Keith to the Report of the Crewe Commission, and National Home Rule League pamphlets Nos. 1 to 15, Election programme for 1920 for which pledges of support were taken from candidates for election to Legislatures, and other pamphlets, were printed and published in English, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and other vernaculars. 25 branches of National Home Rule League were formed in Madras, 45 in Andhra Desha, 9 in Malabar, 13 in Bombay Province, and 2 in Sindh. A few branches were established in Bengal, Bihar, United Provinces and Delhi. Co-operation for propaganda and election purposes was established with Deccan Sabha, Poona Liberal League, Poona Servants of

India Society, and some progressive members of the Madras Liberal League. Friendly relations were established with the Bombay Branch of the All India Home Rule League. A Conference of the National Home Rule League was held at Bombay on 5th April 1920. It was resolved to form a Provincial Council in Bombay and that Councils should be formed for Madras and Andhra Provinces. Election programme for 1920 as regards Indian Legislature and Provincial Legislatures was settled. At the Annual meeting of National Home Rule League it was decided that co-operation with Societies having similar objects should be made one of the objects of the League.

The National Home Rule League, Madras Branch, in a meeting held on 26th October 1919 protested against the introduction of an Indemnity Bill during the then current session of the Imperial Legislative Council to cover the actions of those concerned in dealing with the occurrences in the Punjab and resolved that a Royal Commission was the proper machinery for conducting the promised inquiries into the occurrences in the Punjab which must necessarily involve an examination into the acts of the Government of India

and that the appointment of a committee by the Government of India to report to themselves was therefore not calculated, by the very necessities of the case, to inspire public confidence or to achieve the ends of justice. The occurrences related to the shooting of hundreds of unarmed people in the Jallianwala Park in Amritsar and other events of 1919 which increased the bitterness of the popular feeling against the Government.

Lala Lajput Rai was assaulted by the Police for his patriotic protests and he died soon after.

In September 1920 the British Auxiliary of the National Home Rule for India League was dissolved as India had her feet set on the road to Home Rule by the Reforms Act and her further progress depended on herself, and the special work of the League was finished.

There was a New Zealand and India League affiliated to the National Home Rule League with Annual Conferences, in second of which held on 1st January 1920 Mr. C. Jinarajadasa was present and gave an illuminating address. Pamphlets were distributed to members in over 30 different centres accompanied by a request to post copies to local M. P's, editors, clergymen, school teachers, and prominent labour men.

There was a similar auxiliary organized in Australia in which Senator Reid was constantly at work raising questions in the Federal Senate.

For Canada and South Africa there were representatives working who brought India before the public.

Besides there was British India Union with H. R. H. Duke of Connaught as its head which though purely a social organisation yet exercised a profound influence on public opinion in England and indirectly on Houses of Parliament.

While the Delhi Congress of 1918 and Amritsar Congress of 1919 made a limit of 15 years for the complete establishment of Home Rule for India, Dr. Besant aimed at bringing it within a shorter time. Some members of the National Home Rule League were returned to the Local and Central Legislative Councils.

She associated both with the Indian National Congress and South Indian Liberal Federation and the Muslim League for forming a common platform for achieving Indian freedom. For this purpose an executive committee was elected at Simla on 12-9-1922 at a joint meeting of members

of 2 Houses of Indian Legislature who approved of the calling of a National Convention after the general elections at the end of 1923.

The Reform Act of 1919 was the work of British Government. But the constructive work of Dr. Annie Besant aimed at framing a Swaraj Constitution for India by Indians to be introduced into British Parliament and passed by it, so that it would be the last occasion to seek British Parliamentary legislation for India, as after the passing of the statute marking the attainment of Independence by India, India would be entitled to pass her own laws independent of British Parliament. This was the method adopted by the several colonies in the British Empire for the attainment of their political freedom. Thereafter they became independent of British Parliament. This is a procedure which had become familiar to British Democracy during the preceding decades and it was hoped that it would be easily understood and accepted. The Swaraj Constitution had to be framed by India at a National Convention to be convened for the purpose.

For this purpose, the Executive Committee elected at Simla on 12-9-1922 sent circulars to members of the Indian Legislature, members of

Provincial Councils, Presidents, Vice-Presidents & Chairmen and members of Local Boards and Municipal Corporations, members of National Home Rule League, 1921 clubs, other political associations and well known public workers, to meet in a National Conference at Delhi for framing a programme in order to obtain Dominion Status for the Commonwealth of India in her external relations, and Swaraj in her internal affairs.

The National Conference met on 12th and 13th February 1923 in the Hall of Eastern Hostel of the Central Legislature at Raisina (New Delhi) with 67 members of the Indian Legislature, 76 members of Provincial Councils, 34 elected Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Chairmen and members of Local Boards and Municipalities, 40 elected members of National Home Rule League, 16 elected members of 1921 clubs, 16 elected members of other political associations and 19 well-known public workers. The conveners were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Sivaswamy Ayyar, Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Hon'ble Mr. Purushottamdas Thakurdas and Dr. H. S. Gour, with Dr. Annie Beasant as General Secretary.

The Conference outlined the essentials of a free Constitution. No political question was touched save the attainment of Dominion Status, Home Rule or Swaraj, so that men of all parties, save those who took as their platform the wrecking of the Reforms, may join while preserving their independance. The programme was one-pointed, a Provincial Government wholly responsible to an elected legislature, and a Federal Government responsible to an elected legislature in all civil internal affairs, Army and Navy to be taken over, when it declared itself ready to assume responsibility for their control and maintenance, in Foreign affairs to have the status of other Dominions. A National Convention of members of Legislature with power to co-opt was to draft the constitution. To prepare materials for this work and popularise the idea was this year's objective. To this end, five committees were appointed on Reforms, Defence, Indianisation of the Services, Finance and Taxation, and Supreme Court. A book called "The work of the Indian Legislatures" of 312 pages was compiled under the order of the Conference which also contained the result of the work of four of the Committees, and also a pamphlet on what the Labour Party can do for India

was prepared. They were circulated. Every Home Rule Candidate for the Legislature Elections of 1923 took the Conference pledge which was as follows :- "I pledge myself if elected to help in the forming of a National Convention to be composed of members who have received a mandate to frame a Constitution for India embodying Dominion Status". 18 pamphlets wers issued dealing chiefly with the valuable legislative results derived from the work of the Reformed Councils and with the further changes which should be brought about by the next Legislatures. A monthly Conference Bulletin was also issued from 17—4—1923 of which 14 numbers were published, 12 monthly and 2 special numbers at the time of the elections. 2 small journals one in Tamil and the other in Malayalam were circulated. Pamphlets were published in Tamil, Marathi, Guzerati, Hindi, Sindi and several in Malayalam. A number of pamphlets published by the National Home Rule League was also circulated. The President, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru who went to England as the representative of the India Government at the Imperial Conference did splendid work for India. Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri both in Britain and in his Dominion tour and Sri Jamnadas Dwarakadas while on deputation in Britain also did similar work.

The 2nd year National Conference met at Raisina (New Delhi) on 22nd and 23rd February 1924, in the same Hall in Eastern Hostel. About 200 persons were present. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru took the chair. Dr. H. S. Gour proposed Dr. Besant as General Secretary for the year and said, "I am sure that when the work of the Convention is fulfilled and achieved she will live in our hearts as a lady who has done far more for the emancipation of the people of this country than any political thinker or statesman of our race and blood, who has striven and worked for the achievement af the self-government for India". Sri Bipin Chunder Pal seconded saying that "she was one of those few persons who work in this world with the perpetual consciousness of a power, not of themselves, inspiring them from within and from behind, and from above, and have always believed in these personalities. No defeat can daunt, no disappointment can depress her. In standing singlehanded she is always with God". Dr. Besant thanked for being elected asGeneral Secretary and said that it was not another country that she was working for but for her own as Motherland. Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri was elected Vice-President. The following resolution was passed :

"This Conference having regard to the keen and wide-spread desire in the country for the

immediate revision of the Government of India Act, so as to secure full responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature both in the Provincial and Central Legislatures, regrets the attitude of the Government in this matter, and urges that His Majesty's Government should lose no time in appointing a Commission fully representing all shades of opinion and interests in India, so that immediate measures may be taken for the establishment of full Responsible Government in the Provinces, and the transference of all departments at present administered by the Governor-General-in-Council, to a Cabinet responsible to the elected Legislature, except Foreign Affairs including relations with the Indian States, and the Defence of the country, suitable provision being made to place the latter Department under the control of the Indian Legislature as early as practicable, such provision to include steps to be taken in the meanwhile to bring the subject of Indianisation of the Army, and the Territorial and Auxiliary Forces more under the influence of the Central Legislature".

The Conference appointed Dr. Sapru, Dr. Annie Besant and Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri with the hope of adding a few more when the

time came, as members of a deputation to England to work for the furtherance of the objects mentioned in the above resolution, and resolved that the Convention should meet for its first session on the 22nd and 23rd April 1924 and on such other dates as may be necessary, at Allahabad.

The National Conference published 19 pamphlets which had wide circulation of which the first was a soul-stirring exhortation to Indians entitled "Organize! Organize!". The third was "What is the National Conference? What is its object? What is it doing to gain at?" and 15th was "Self-determination and self-government", all three by Dr. Besant.

The Conservative Government in Britain sustained a reverse at an unexpected election precipitated by itself and the Labour Party which was friendly to India and which was believed to be far off from power suddenly came into office though the Labour Government was not secure of a majority in the House of Commons. In the Imperial Legislative Council, a proposal for the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the subject of Reforms was rejected though a resolution asking for a Round Table Conference to be appointed by Government for drafting Indian Constitution was passed.

But the National Conference wanted to have India's Constitution to be framed at a National Convention. A public meeting was held in Gokhale Hall, Madras, on 15th March 1924 under the auspices of the National Conference to familiarise the public with the work to be accomplished by the National Convention. A National Convention Bulletin was published under the editorship of Dr. Besant, the General Secretary, and widely circulated, from April 1924 to October 1924.

The National Convention consisted of about 250 members, 222 of them being past or present members of the Legislatures of whom 12 were members of Council of State, 13 were members of Bengal Legislative Assembly, 2 of Assam, 15 of Bombay, 2 of Burma, 1 of Central Provinces, 7 of Bihar and Orissa, 15 of Madras, 1 of North West Frontier Province, 7 of the Punjab, 10 of United Provinces, while 7 were members of Assam Legislative Council, 3 of Bengal, 4 of Bihar and Orissa, 36 of Bombay, 5 of Central Provinces, 52 of Madras,2 of the Punjab and 28 of United Provinces, and 23 being members of the Council of the National Home Rule League, with over 100 branches in India, one member representing the

Women's Indian Association, and one member for each of the Political Sections of the three 1921 Clubs, in Madras, Bombay and Calicut.

The convention was established at Allahabad on 22—4—1924. It met and formed the 7 great departments of the Commonwealth of India Bill with respective committees whose reports formed the basis of the considered decision of the whole Convention. These Committees were formed for reporting about (1) Executive Government, (2) Legislatures, (3) Judicial and Legal, (4) Protection of minorities, (5) Franchise for Central and Provincial Legislatures and for Local Boards, (6) Finance and Taxation, (7) Relations of Central and Provincial Governments. The following members were elected for deputation to England:- (1) President, (2) Vice-President, (3) General Secretary, (4) Munshi Ishwar Saran, (5) Kanji Dwarakadas and (6) R. K. Shanmukham Chettiar.

A National Convention Deputation consisting of Dr Besant, The Lady Emily Lutyens, Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and Mr. Munshi Ishwar Saran sailed for England on 26-4-1924 to work for the furtherance of the objects mentioned in the principal resolution passed at the Conference. The first batch of the members of the Deputation

were given a send-off at a public meeting in Bombay on 24th April 1924 at which Sir Chimanlal Setalwad took the chair. The first batch was to sail for England on 26th April 1924, the second on 10th May 1924, and others later as occasion would arise. Dr. Annie Besant divided the activities of the Deputation in England into 3 kinds. First, lectures and usual discussions; second, large demonstrations in Queen's Hall, London, and Free Trade Hall, Manchester, to influence public opinion in England, and special meetings with the Indian Parliamentary Committee through which members of the House of Commons were to be addressed; third, interviews with the members of the Government.

The Deputation presented a memorandum making a united demand for Dominion Home Rule for India signed by Dr. Besant, Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Mr. Munshi Ishwar Saran, Sir Ali Imam, Sir K. G. Gupta and others, to the India Office, claiming amongst other matters that India should draft her own constitution in the same way as the Dominions and the Irish Free State did and that the Central Government should be carried on by the Viceroy with a cabinet responsible to the Indian Legislature, the Defence of the

country remaining in the hands of the Viceroy, subject to agreed reservations until the Responsible Government of India was ready to take it over, and Foreign Affairs including relations with Indian Princes secured by treaties, being left with the Viceroy, and that the Provincial Government should be autonomous with a cabinet responsible to the elected legislatures, and a High Court controlling the judiciary. The signatories believed that the safety of the connection between Britain and India depended on the establishment of Dominion Home Rule in India as quickly as possible and that it was desirable that a commission should be sent to India in the coming autumn with wide terms of reference.

The public campaign in England was opened in Bradford by a big meeting in St. George's Hall, presided over by H. C. Charleston, M. P. at which Dr. Besant, Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Mr. Munshi Ishwar Saran spoke. There was a grand demonstration in Queen's Hall, London, on 25-6-1924 in favour of 'Indian Dominion' presided over by Mr.Robert Smithie, M.P. Interviews, articles in the daily papers, lectures, private talks, persuasions of members of Parliament to support the Dominion Home Rule Bill when it

would come to Parliament—all methods and means for ensuring success of the Bill when the Indian National Convention would send it to Parliament were employed with considerable success. Dr. Besant spoke, with Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri at Cary Hall, Cardiff, on 'India—a Dominion'. She addressed other public meetings one in Assembly Rooms, Downing Street, another at Bath, and in the rooms of the Indian Association, Caxton Hall, London, "On the present political position in India". There was a grand Demonstration at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on 7—7—1924, at which Mr. Hookway, President of the Manchester Labour Party presided, and Dr. Besant, Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Mr George Lansbury and Mr. Shanmukham Chettiar spoke. Dr. Besant lectured at Folkestone and Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri spoke in Birmingham Town Hall, Liverpool Rotary Club, and Leeds Rotary Club.

Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri spoke in an interview that "the Deputation made an impression, the credit of which must go entirely to the friends and followers of Dr. Besant. Their devotion and personal loyalty to her are marvellous and the cause of India profits by them". Dr.

Besant lectured at Sprewsbury in Theatre Royal presided over by Mr. Joseph Sunlight M. P. and in Edinburgh in the Music Hall on the Dominion Home Rule in India on 26—7—1924 at which Major Graham Pole presided. She also gave an address at Oxford. The Deputation held a very large number of meetings in England, Scotland and Wales, many of which were called by the Labour Party. No fewer than 363 Labour Organizations sent up to the Prime Minister and members of Parliamant a resolution in support of Dominion Home Rule for India. Weekly meetings were arranged at the house of Lady Muriel, Countess de la Warr. At one of those meetings a declaration was drawn up of the essentials of a Free Constitution for India which was presented to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. On 23—7—1924 there was a Demonstration in the Great Queen's Hall in London in honour of Dr. Besant's Fiftieth anniversary of her entry into public life. More than 500 delegates were present representing almost every branch of progressive work in the world, and many organizations sent their representatives. The Premier Mr. Ramsay Macdonald sent his appreciative reply regretting his absence. So also Lord Haldane, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Philip Snowden M. P, and Miss.

Despard. There were 15 speakers including Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri who, as he said, laid India's homage at her feet and garlanded her. Mr. Graham Pole M. P. presided.

Dr. Besant left England in August 1924 with the aim of presenting a united front of National Home Rule League, All-India Congress Committee, Swarajya Party, Liberal Federation, National Convention, Muslim League, and 'Independent Party' just then formed. She approached Gandhiji who wrote "Congress Constitution has broken down. We have no electorate worth the name. We are almost a self-appointed electorate and self-appointed representatives, since Non-co-operation and Civil Disobedience have broken down". He suggested three things in which all could unite, the Spinning Wheel, Unity between the different communities and Removal by Hindus of untouchability. He wanted the Congressmen to spin for half an hour a day. Dr. Besant for the sake of unity agreed to spin for half an hour a day if Non-co-operation and Civil Disobedience were suspended and to rejoin the Congress if the Congress which would meet at Belgaum would accept his minimum programme. Dr. Besant left for Belgaum taking a spinning wheel with her

The Congress had already passed its own usual resolution in a line with Non-co-operation, Civil disobedience and rejection of Montague-Chelmsford reforms even before Dr. Besant could reach the Congress Pandal, without reference to the minimum programme to which she had agreed. She returned immediately to Bombay.

She arrived in Simla in September 1924. She had meetings with leaders of all parties, and there was a general feeling that adoption of Non-co-operation and Civil Disobedience and Hindu-Muslim disunity were two obstacles to unity and that those should be removed. There was a unity conference in Delhi which Dr. Besant attended in support of Hindu-Muslim unity on 26—9—1924. She talked with several leaders including Mr. Chitta Ranjan Das, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mr. M. R. Jayakar about holding a Round Table Conference in Bombay in November 1924 for drafting a constitution for India.

There was a Reform Inquiry Committee set up by the Government of India to examine the working of the Reforms Act of 1919 and to see what further steps should be taken.

There was now a change in British Government with Tory Government in power. In the agenda of 24th annual conference of the Labour Party in Queen's Hall in London in November 1924, Finsbury Labour Party and Trade Council and two other local Labour Parties brought forward a Resolution that "the Labour Conference is of the opinion that the time has arrived to grant to India a full measure of Home Rule equal in Status to that enjoyed by South Africa and other self-governing colonies".

The National Convention brought up 26 memoranda on various aspects of self-government to help in the framing of the Commonwealth of India Bill. The Commonwealth of India Bill which was approved in substance by the Indian National Convention was framed and circulated for public criticism and comments. The aim of Dr. Besant was achieved in having a bill framed by Indians for India to be presented to Parliament for the last time as a Bill, as subsequent constitutional changes would be effected by the Indian Commonwealth Legislature without recourse to British Parliament. Its salient points were that it purported to confer upon India the status of a self - governing Dominion. The Secretary of State's Council of India was abolished. The Secretary of State for India had the same relation

to the Commonwealth of India as the Secretary of State in the British Cabinet had to the Governments of the Dominions. In this Democratic age the European form of Democracy is not the last word on the right form of Democratic Government. Indian genius in the art of Government, as it did in social and moral affairs, recognized that political responsibility of a voter should go hand in hand with the required political wisdom and knowledge to discharge his political responsibility. The conferment of the right of "one man one vote" to every adult in the Commonwealth irrespective of his political knowledge in respect of political subjects ranging from the Central or Imperial problems of Government down to the Provincial, District or local administrations till the village level was reached, and coupled with a high percentage of illiteracy, would not augur well for a sound and wise Government. So in the Commonwealth of India Bill framed, there was prescribed a graded scheme of functions and franchises. That is, it prescribed graduated sets of powers as one ascended from Village Panchayats to Taluka Sabhas, to District Samities (Rural) or Municipal Councils (Urban), to Provincial Legislative Councils, and to the National Parliament at the highest level. Similarly the qualifications of members and electors for the several

units were graded for the discharge of their respective responsibilities rising stage by stage. In the Bill India remained in the Indo-British Commonwealth which is likely to be a nucleus for a World Government in a far off future. There was no partition of India in the Bill as at present into India and Pakistan, which had not then risen as a living issue. The Bill was put into Parliamentary form by the then British Attorney-General Mr. Slesser (who subsequently became Mr. Justice Slesser). The Bill was presented by Mr. George Lansbury M. P. in the British House of Commons, supported by Mr. Snell, Col. Wedgwood, Mr. Charleston, Mr. Haden Guest, Mr. Walter Baker, Mr. Gillett, Mr. Lees Smith, Mr. James Hudson, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Scurr, and was ordered to be printed by the House of Commons on 17-12-1925. It passed through the First Reading in Parliament. But some of the Congress Leaders cabled to England that it was not their bill. It lapsed in the subsequent session of British Parliament.

Mrs. Besant went to England in April 1929. On 27th June 1929 there was a grand Demonstration in Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on "Britain's Rule in India-A danger to the peace of the World"

organized by the Commonwealth of India League, Manchester, presided over by Hon. George Lansbury, M. P. and Cabinet Minister, in which Dr Besant, Munshi Ishwar Saran, B. Shiva Rao, Major Graham Pole and others spoke. It was a great success. There was also a 'Commonwealth of India' Conference held at Caxton Hall, London, at which Dr. Besant presided. Many Indians including Munshi Ishwar Saran and others took part. A resolution was passed unanimously by the delegates present in favour of 'Dominion Status' for India. In the evening of 29th June 1929 Dr. Besant gave a public lecture on the subject of 'Dominion Status for India'.

There was an All Parties Conference held in Bombay joined by different political parties which appointed a committee to seek for ways to draw parties together to bring about Hindu-Muslim Unity and outline a scheme of Swaraj.

Between 1925 and 1929, Dr. Besant was very active in bringing different political parties and leaders together for framing an agreed scheme of Swaraj and creating public opinion to that end, by her articles in the Press, by lectures in different parts of the country and by circulation of

literature. A scheme of Swaraj was ultimately drawn up under the guidance of Pandit Motilal Nehru. An All Parties Conference was held at Calcutta in December 1929 in which all political parties were represented. Mr. Muhamad Ali Jinnah representing the Muslim League was there. Mr. M. R. Jayakar (afterwards Rt. Hon'ble Mr. Jayakar) was there, championing the cause of the Hindus. After a few clauses in the scheme were passed, it foundered when it came to the stage of fixing the percentage of Muslim representation in the Central Legislature, Mr. Jayakar speaking for the Hindus limiting the percentage to 25 percent and Mr. Jinnah claiming 30 percent for Muslims. Dr. Besant seemed to be not particular whether it was 25 or 30 per cent as long as 30 per cent was only a minority and would not make any difference. Muslim League's claims were subsequently improved and one point of difference developed into 14 points of difference which subsequently became bitter points of controversy in the subsequent Round Table Conferences which were held in London at which Gandhiji alone represented the Indian National Congress. A Commission had been constituted by British Government consisting of wholly Britishers under the Chairmanship of Lord Simon which was boycotted by both Indian National Congress, and National Home Rule League.

Here should be mentioned that Lala Lajput Rai, the Arya Samajist leader and public worker in the Punjab, strongly protested and obstructed the work of the Simon Commission for which he was cruelly handled by the police and the mental anguish caused by police violence on his person might have hastened his death which took place on 17th November 1928, referred to in page 42 (ante).

A Government of India Act was passed by Parliament in 1935 which was not accepted by the National Congress or National Home Rule League. But Dr. Besant nevertheless, in spite of differences amongst political parties which stood in the way of framing a Swaraj Constitution forIndia by Indians, continued to carry her campaign with unabated vigour in the Press, platform and political organizations. Subsequently her health began to fail and she passed away on 23—9—1933.

Going through the above narration, often a thought may occur to our minds whether if all the political parties joined their forces in support of Commonwealth of India Bill framed under her guidance and presented to Parliament in 1925 we would not have gained our Independence earlier and without the partition of India into two independent countries. But it is useless to

speculate upon what would have happened otherwise than what has actually happened.

Along with the work of Dr. Annie Besant as narrated in the above manner for the winning of India's political freedom we have to recognize and feel grateful for the sympathetic co-operation of the British Labour Party on the whole and some of its prominent leaders who have always supported Dr. Besant in her political work for India.

Many events have occurred between 1925 and September 1947 when Indian Independence was recognized at long last by Britain, such as Round Table Conferences, Act of 1935, The Second World War, Gandhiji's 'Quit India' Movement, Cripp's Mission, British Cabinet proposals, Viceroy's Joint Council of Congress and Muslim League Representatives, Allies' victory in war, founding of United Nations Organization, separation of India and Pakistan attended by evacuation of the former by Muslims and the latter by Hindus with attendant atrocities, and other incidents. What contributions did subsequent events make to the attainment of that Freedom is a matter for the consideration of the sober historian, after the clouds of prejudice, passion

and partisanship have passed away, as this is concerned only with the inspiring part which Dr. Besant took therein.

But the constructive plan of Dr. Besant carefully drawn up and laboriously worked out with one-pointed will determined to overcome all obstacles towards the attainment of that freedom from 1913 to 1929 is an outstanding example of what a mighty heroic spirit strove for and achieved towards the consummation of the attainment of India's Freedom, whose constitution India's representatives ultimately framed after attaining Freedom, with India continuing to remain a free member of the Indo-British Commonwealth of Nations as planned by Dr. Besant. It would be useful and inspiring to the citizens of India to cherish with love and gratitude the lessons offered by her work forming a splendid chapter in the history of the attainment of India's Freedom.

Asoka Printers, Madurai -55

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